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1954/12/01

Lansdale

S-E-C-R-E-T

1 December 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR AMBASSADOR COLLINS

Subject: Reprisals on Army

1. Talked to Lt-Col Tran Dinh Lan, G-6 of VNA, this morning in preventative work re the reported plot to assassinate President Diem when he returned at the airport this noon. Lan seemed genuinely surprised at the news (I reported it to him as a rumor I had heard to trap and kill G-6 personnel at the airport as alleged assassins; asked him keep all his folks away from there, which he did). This afternoon, Lan said a French officer had advised him to pack up, since he would be leaving the country within a very short time. Lan admitted he had obeyed Hinh's orders and thus had been active politically and was willing to accept the consequences. But, he said his men were worried that all of them would suffer in the future, even though they had merely obeyed orders. They are through with politics.

2. Later, I talked to Minh about the Soc Trang trip. Minh made it plain that he was worried over the morale of the army as a result of the President taking action in army affairs (such as Phan-rang). Col. Kim, Minh's exec, expressed concern over much the same thing in a separate conversation.

3. I get the feeling from these conversations, plus others in the past several days, that morale in the army is dangerously low. It would be sheer folly if the only national force now in being were destroyed, when we have the means to prevent it. I feel that the army should learn at the soonest possible moment re U.S. intent to help them directly, with MAAG officers in direct contact with them. Also, if possible, Diem should issue some firm statement of policy re no reprisals if everybody gets back to work loyally right now.

4. Lt-Col Lan strikes me as good leader material, of which there is not too great a local supply. It would be a wise move by us if we could send him to school at Leavenworth or Benning right now (he is busy studying English in his desire to make friends with Filipinos).

5. Incidentally, the assassination scare apparently was based on a riot in Cholon last night. Secretary of State Lien flew down to Soc Trang to tell the President about it, fearing the riot might develop into a coup. The riot started when some military refused to pay a restaurant bill and wound up with a fire fight with the Surete, who later arrested the army personnel. Casualties reported to the President were 4 killed, 14 wounded, on both sides. The military were from a refugee camp on the outskirts of Cholon. (However, I believe the source of Randy's information was talking about the Military Security Section under Col Mai Huu Xuan rather than G-6).

Ed

EDWARD G LANSDALE
Colonel USAF

copies to: Mr Kidder
General O'Daniel

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